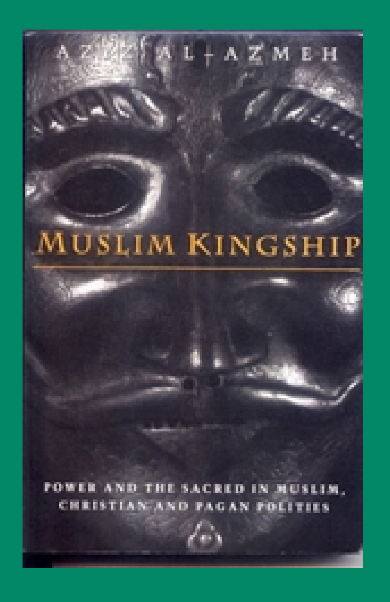


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nu decide asupra propriei sale morti ci doar asupra *cînd*-ului si *cum*-ului ei, devenind astfel muritor inautentic, anormal, tocmai facîndu-se pe el mort. Aici intervine si diferenta dintre sinucidere si gîndul mortii de care s-a vorbit pe parcursul lucrarii. Nu lipsita de importanta este problema mortii din perspectiva hermeneutica pornind de la Gadamer care sustine ca "sarcina hermeneutica în raport cu tematica mortii este de a recunoaste ceea ce este cunoscut" adica de a recunoaste ceea ce se afla ascuns în ceea ce stim si întelegem.

În încheiere, autorul contureaza relatiile dintre medicalizarea mortii ca fuga traditionala de moarte, cît si ca o conditie a atitudinii metafizice. "Metafizica nadajduieste sa nege si sa învinga moartea prin ne-murire iar medicina sa învinga moartea ca maladie dusmanoasa ca trebuie transgresata si eliminata prin tratamentul ei".

În ansamblu, lucrarea propusa de Istvan Kiraly surprinde prin originalitatea abordarii problemei mortii din perspectiva filosofiei aplicate si punctele de intîlnire ale acesteia cu metafizica, sustinînd necesitatea confruntarii cu factitatea si caracterul specific de *factum* al mortii. *Factum*-ul metafizic este tocmai depasirea conceptului mortii si atingerea termenului categorial ei, iar specificitatea factuala a mortii este aceea ca, desi o cunoastem, noi nu o putem totusi gîndi niciodata în mod actual.

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Aziz Al-Azmeh, Muslim Kingship. Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities,

Tauris, 2001

Aziz Al-Azmeh, widely known for his book *Islam and Modernities,* is a Professor at the American University in Beirut and now teaches *Islamgeisteswissenschaften* at the University of Berlin. His latest book in English, *Muslim Kingship. Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* was published by I. B. Tauris Publishing House in 2001.

In times when international politics on the basis of the 11th September events or of the Iraqi matter forces us, through conceptual means, to consider the Islam question in terms of a radical distinction between *us* and *them*, this book demonstrates clearly that things are not really like that. This is the explicit aim of the author in this book: to remove Muslim polities in the Middle Ages from the exotic and incommensurable individuality attributed to them both by their own advocates and by standard scholarship, by writers and scholars both expert and inexpert. At a conceptual level this is done by analyzing the strong relation between power and the sacred.

Key Words:

Islam, power, the sacred, Christianity, muslim kingship, paganism

Assuming as a starting point the idea that the essence of power is given by its manifestation, that power is always enunciative and never mute, Aziz Al-Azmeh studies the languages of power, either linguistic and conceptual or iconographic and tactile, from different times in the Middle Ages and from different religions. Nevertheless, the methodology adopted, as we read in the *Preface*, is not a comparative study and belongs neither to the evolutionist nor to the organismal models. "It indicates parallels, analogues and continuities conceived not as effects of abiding and continuing origins."

The institution of kingship was generally thought to be one which brings and maintains order and harmony (symbols of divinity) in the world, both the world of humanity and in some cases the world of inanimate elements. Because of this, as Aziz Al-Azmeh states, the institution of kingship obtains a "condition of liminality" between the sacred and the profane, the Gods and the mortals, and this in all religions.

The Egyptian pharaohs were seen in their time as identities that participated in the divine substance but who existed terrestrially, and were also seen as beings that held a multitude of attributes. The main characteristics that define the pharaohs are those of being seeds containing divine substance, the possession of functions assuring the maintenance of the world, and the status as objects of veneration and even of worship, but they were also mortals and worshipers of god.

In the Western world the first who saw their kings as mediators between mortals and gods were the Ancient Greeks. Plato and Aristotle stated clearly enough that if the best man should become king then the best man should be worshiped. Following these philosophers, Christians assumed the same point of view regarding this matter. Was not Jesus Christ the king of kings, was not He the one who carried the seed of divinity in His veins, and was not He a mortal?

But this cosmic centrality of the king can be found in Muslim polities too. As the Prophet says, the caliph is God's shadow on earth. For Muslims, because of the uniqueness of God, there can be only one caliph who, like the Prophet, is elected by God Himself and entrusted by Him with the affairs of the world, as His trustee and vicar: "the caliph is God's caliph, his treasury God's wealth, his army God's army, his enemy the enemy of God."

As Aziz Al-Azmeh shows, this fact is not a mere coincidence but rather the necessary effect of a carefully developed process through which power was sacralized.

The basic scheme through which the power of the king was sacralized in the Christian world is a play of typologies which, through interpretation, finds similitudes and equivalences between different sacred textual fragments and between these and some contemporary personalities and institutions. In general it can be said that the essence of these typologies consists in incorporating parts of history and public life into a register of the divine rhythms.

For an outsider the Arabic corpus of political wisdom could appear to be just a repertoire of examples,

historical or not, addressed to the caliph and promoting correct actions. Nowhere is a theory of state or of kingship attempted. Still, as Aziz Al-Azmeh shows, this does not mean that the early Muslim polity sprang from nothing.

The sources of the Muslim political thought are constituted basically from a Persian legacy admixed with Greek philosophical concepts and the Muslim canon, although we cannot trace clear genealogies. We cannot say for sure that the wisdom came from the Persians and, in an auxiliary manner, from the Greeks, and that the philosophical notions came from the Greeks almost exclusively.

The Muslims assumed Aristotelian philosophical concepts but they did not assume Aristotle's philosophical anthropology as well. As Aziz Al-Azmeh, shows the specific Muslim worldview was a profoundly pessimistic one. "It was the universal consensus of medieval Muslim authors of all persuasions, writing in all genres, that the nature of humankind is such that its orderly collective existence can only be guaranteed by unrelenting maintenance on the part of a vigilant ruler."

This pessimistic anthropology, as Aziz Al-Azmeh says, is a very important aspect of Muslim tradition because, on the one hand, the inequality and unevenness implied by it were seen as the natural preconditions of order (in particular social order), and on the other hand, this pessimistic view towards humanity was the supreme reason for the existence of kingship.

In the medieval Muslim world people can be united as a society only through the intervention of kingship using a combination of political techniques that follow two axioms: that of cooperation among different parts performing different actions and that of hierarchy superimposed upon this functionally concatenated order.

"In other words, though what we might today call state and society are relative terms which are in practice inconceivable except in conjunction with each other, the primary and conceptually anterior moment in the constitution of this relationship is the state and not society. In the medieval Muslim conception, the body politic, whose locus is the king, constitutes the body social and maintains it. The relation is not the other way round."

But because of this artificiality and unnaturalness, society requires constant and continuous maintenance, the permanent manifestation of the absolute power. From this point of view it is not wrong to say that the primordial imperative in Muslim polities was an absolutist one.

One can speak about sociality and social order in the Muslim polities only on the basis of this imperative of absolutism. Of course along with the caliph Muslim polities knew the king as well. In fact the king and the caliph had almost the same sacral status, both being God's shadow on earth, but this does not mean that they were indistinguishable. But if a distinction between the two is to be made, this should be made assuming two specific things: first of all the pietistic and

ultimately eschatological vision of history, and secondly the designation of legitimate order by the juristic elaboration of public life, by juristic legitimization in its conception of the caliphate.

If we will approach the problem from the point of view of their sacred power we will see that caliphs are subordinated only to prophets, and that kings are subordinated both to prophets and caliphs; in other words the king is for the caliph what subjects are for the king. On the other hand, if we approach the problem from the point of view of the legal discourse we will see that the absolutist powers of the caliph are not derogated but delegated to the king. The king's power depends entirely on that of the caliph.

We can clearly understand from this that although Muslim polities knew both the king and the caliph, the imperative of absolutism remained untouched.

Up to now we have presented the strongest points of the book. But, in our opinion, there is one negative aspect too. After the Foucault moment in the history of philosophy it is clear for us that every time that the question of power arises we should take into consideration a certain distinction between two aspects or regimes of it. Starting with the consolidation of human society the essence of power was considered to be given by the fact that is a priviledge of the few but, as Foucault shows, in Western world, this thing has changed in the Classical age when the power was thought to consist rather in its exercise. Power as exercise is a continuous production articulated and supported by human needs which are used creatively by its internal dynamics on the one hand and, on the other, it simultaneously works at both micro and macro social level. This difference between these aspects of power is present in Muslim world, even though it is possible that the proces of differentiation couldn't have followed the same history as in West. This is a fact that can easily be seen in *Muslim Kingship*. For example, the book shows that in Middle Ages not only the caliph, but also the caliphal *objects* were venerated for their supernatural powers. It is said that a provincial governor soaked in water the letters which he received from the caliph and with this water baked bread for feeding his family. But, besides this, we also can read that: "The torture, destitution, and often finally the execution of viziers and other senior officials occupies a notable place in the chronicles of the Abbasid caliphate, especially in the period of military anarchy." In our opinion it is indubitable that the reality exists, the two aspects of power are present in Muslim world, but the author doesn't draw a clear distinction at a theoretical level between them. And, by not doing so it is more harder for us to comprehend adequately the culture and the tradition he is talking about.

Nevertheless, assuming that *Muslim Kingship* aims only to suggest and not to exhaust the connections between power and the sacred in Muslim medieval world, and by comparison with what the book manages to show, the lack of this distinction does not seem to be a real problem.